

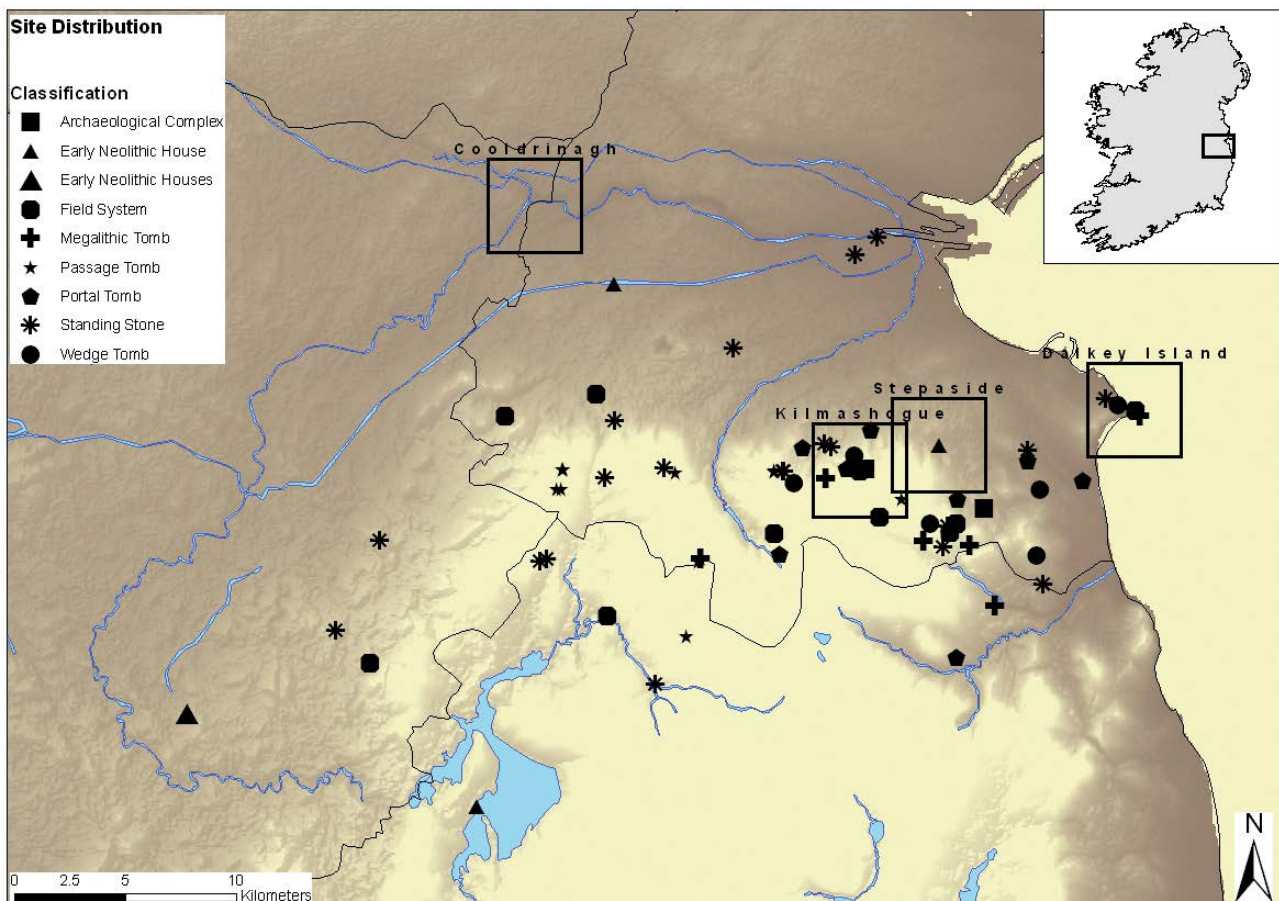
LIVING FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE SEA : UNDERSTANDING NEOLITHIC SETTLEMENT AND SOCIETY IN THE DUBLIN - WICKLOW UPLANDS AND LOWLANDS

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The chronological range of the survey is from the Mesolithic until the transition to the Early Bronze Age (8000-2000 BC), focusing centrally on the Neolithic (4000-2500 BC). The coastline of the Dublin and Killiney Bays and the courses of the Liffey and the Dargle Rivers delimit the study area. The region consists of a varied landscape including peat-covered granite uplands, the agriculturally rich soils of the carboniferous limestone plain as well as river valleys, flood plains, estuaries and the coastal zone (fig. 1).

The study will provide an overview and interpretation of human exploitation and interaction with the environment during the earlier prehistoric period in this significant region. Traditionally

upstanding monuments, particularly megalithic tombs have dominated archaeological narratives of the area ; these display distinctive patterns, some of which are suggestive of a significant focus upon the uplands (e.g. STOUT & STOUT 1992 ; STOUT 1994 ; COONEY 2000 ; RICE 2006). These include eight portal tombs (seven in Dublin and one in Wicklow) that are mainly situated in the east of the study area in the foothills of the mountains and a cemetery formed by twelve passage tombs (eleven in Dublin and one in Wicklow), which are located upon prominent upland peaks. A total of five wedge tombs situated in close proximity to each other and a further six unclassified megalithic tombs, all occur in Dublin. Additionally, there are two Linkardstown cists that were excavated by antiquarians. Other prehistoric



monuments include twenty-one standing stones, isolated or in pairs (sixteen examples in Dublin, three in Wicklow and two in Kildare), ten prehistoric field systems (eight in Dublin, one in Kildare and one in Wicklow) and a number of upland archaeological complexes, which include those at Piperstown and Kilmashogue in Co. Dublin and Blessington in County Wicklow.

In contrast to the monumental evidence, recent large-scale development-led archaeological projects have resulted in numerous important subsurface discoveries within more low-lying terrain, which now form the main component of the archaeological record. There was a dramatic upsurge in developer-funded excavations in Ireland from the mid-1990s (ANON 2006 ; COONEY *et al.* 2006 ; DOYLE *et al.* 2002, 13) until the end of the economic boom in 2008, with 242 excavation licences issued in County Dublin alone in 2004 (BENNETT 2007). This increase has generated a wealth of unpublished data about the nature and extent of prehistoric activity that has great research potential (e.g. BRADLEY 2006 and 2007). Large-scale infrastructural and commercial developments have produced both new kinds of site and an expansion in the range, frequency and distribution of older kinds. For example, evidence for Mesolithic activity has been uncovered at Dalkey Island (LIVERSAGE 1967/68 ; LEON 2001, 2005) and Cooldrinagh, County Dublin (MULLINS 1999), while the remains of Early Neolithic settlements, including ten rectangular structures, have been excavated at Kishoge (O'DONOVAN 2001, 2003, 2003/04) and Kilgobbin in County Dublin (HAGEN 2003) and Baltyboys Upper in County Wicklow (CORLETT 2010), as well as Corbally, County Kildare (PURCELL 2000, 2001, 2002 ; TOBIN 2002, 2003, 2004). Other examples include increasing evidence for the deposition of artefacts in pits during the Neolithic, such as stone axes, beads, ceramics and lithics, evidence for the use of Late Neolithic Grooved Ware at sites such as Steelstown in County Kildare (F. Walsh pers. comm.) and a large quantity of sites with Beaker associated artefacts (CARLIN 2005).

This diverse evidence indicates a much greater distribution and range of activities across the landscape than hitherto suspected. Some research on a site-specific level has been undertaken (e.g. SEAVER 2004 ; LEON 2005 ; Ó DRISCEOIL 2006), however, there has been no synthesis of this new material, nor discussion of the solid basis it provides for a better understanding of settlement activity and patterning. The significance of these excavations is best understood in relation to each other, their landscape setting and broader patterns of activity. Therefore, this project will integrate all published and unpublished data in order to achieve new insights into major social changes.

Much of the unpublished development-led data has been generated by projects working at a landscape

scale, which facilitates research at that level. However, in contrast to Britain (e.g. PARKER PEARSON 2007 ; RICHARDS 2005 ; MITHEN 2000), there have been relatively few integrated landscape archaeological studies undertaken in Ireland. Examples include the analysis of the prehistoric landscapes of North Munster (GROGAN 2005) and North Leinster (COONEY 1987). Where applied, such studies have provided an important landscape-based theoretical perspective and revealed a complex interrelationship between sites and their environs that clearly illustrate the advantages of examining the archaeological record within an interpretative, integrated approach and at a regional scale (e.g. GROGAN *et al.* 2007, BRADY 2007). Therefore, this project is developing the first fully integrative landscape approach to this crucial region during Irish prehistory that will serve as a case-study and model for comparison with other landscapes in Ireland and Europe. The south Dublin, north Wicklow and east Kildare area are particularly important, not only because it is the region in Ireland which witnessed the most intensive development during the economic boom, and thus has the greatest density of new and currently non-assessed data, but also because of the range of upstanding monuments and the diversity of terrain. Combined, these provide a very good basis for assessing the value of utilising different data sets.

The data is being compiled from a range of sources - mainly unpublished excavation reports and published data - and is being analysed within the context of the different landscape zones to provide a new interpretation for the Neolithic in this region. The project is utilising differing scales of analysis, ranging from large-scale regional overviews to specific case-studies, including fieldwork targeted on particular archaeological complexes and landscapes and the design and implementation of a detailed regional database. Four distinct case-study areas are being examined in detail to provide varied scales of analysis. Each is c.5km² and provides a sample of distinct topographical zones within the region. They include an area in the Dublin/Wicklow Mountains centred on Kilmashogue Mountain, one in the foothills of these mountains with the suburbs of Stepaside and Carrickmines as its focus, an area on the lowland plain adjacent to the River Liffey at Cooldrinagh and one in the coastal zone centred on Dalkey Island.

By moving beyond the site-specific and situating past activity within the broader context of the cultural landscape, it is hoped that a greater understanding of early prehistoric occupation and the construction of social identities will be achieved. The results will be situated within their wider national and international context through comparative analysis with early prehistoric landscape studies in northwest Wales, southwestern Scotland and the Paris Basin and Brittany in France. These areas have

been selected because of cultural and trade links between them and Ireland during the Neolithic and their proximity to the Irish Sea region, a focus of activity during prehistory.

There is much new evidence in Ireland for a wide range of activities during the Neolithic, but despite this, narratives continue to focus on a restricted range of data: houses and tombs. The research will tackle broad issues such as the dating and character of the transition from the Mesolithic to the Neolithic and its manifestation in this area, the establishment of agriculture, the development of monumentality and the social changes associated with the emergence of new ideologies at the end of the Neolithic. It is clear that people modified their surroundings to support subsistence strategies and in doing so also imbued it with meaning and significance. Therefore, the availability of such a rich dataset offers great potential to document early prehistoric communities and the landscapes they inhabited and formed. Concepts of local and regional identity, ritual in everyday life, trade and exchange with other regions and cultural and social change and its expression through material culture will be examined.

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Abstract

The projects principal aim is to provide an in-depth analysis of early prehistoric settlement, funerary and ritual activity in eastern Ireland, focusing specifically on the counties of south Dublin, north Wicklow and east Kildare. The intense pace of recent infrastructural development in the region has revealed extensive prehistoric cultural remains. The range, quantity and quality of this new data provide a very important and hitherto untapped dataset for the analysis and understanding of human settlement and the development of early prehistoric social and economic systems within a tightly defined yet diverse landscape. An integrative landscape approach is being used to investigate the rich material culture of the area. Through the examination of sites in relation to each other and their physical landscape, the study will move beyond traditional narratives of the area to provide insight into people's relationship to place and the varying temporal scales of human occupation during the Neolithic.

Keywords : Ireland, Mesolithic, Neolithic, landscape, grey literature.

Zusammenfassung

Hauptziel dieser Studie ist eine detaillierte Analyse der ersten Besiedlung sowie der vorgeschichtlichen Bestattungsrituale und -Praktiken in Ostirland und insbesondere im Süden der Grafschaft Dublin, im Norden der Grafschaft Wicklow und im Osten der Grafschaft Kildare. Der Bauboom der letzten Jahre im Bereich der Infrastrukturen hat die Entdeckung zahlreicher Spuren von vorgeschichtlichen Kulturen in der Region erlaubt. Die Menge, die Qualität und die Natur dieser Daten sind neu und ermöglichen ein besseres Verständnis der Besiedlung sowie der Entwicklung der ersten ökonomischen und sozialen Systeme in dieser abwechslungsreichen Landschaft. Der kulturelle Reichtum der Region wurde einer globalen Betrachtung unterzogen. Die vorliegende Studie geht über die herkömmlichen regionalen Berichte hinaus und beschäftigt sich mit der Verteilung der Fundstätten und ihrer Relation mit der Landschaft. Sie erforscht die Verbindung der Menschen mit ihrer Umwelt im Laufe der unterschiedlichen Phasen der neolithischen Besiedlung.

Schlagwörter : Irland, Mesolithikum, Neolithikum, Landschaft, graue Literatur

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Résumé

Le principal objectif est de fournir une analyse détaillée des premiers peuplements ainsi que des rituels et pratiques funéraires préhistoriques dans l'est de l'Irlande, et plus spécifiquement dans les comtés du sud de Dublin, nord de Wicklow et est de Kildare. Récemment, le développement important des infrastructures dans la région a permis la découverte de nombreux vestiges culturels préhistoriques. Le volume, la qualité et la nature de ces données sont inédits et permettent une meilleure compréhension des peuplements humains et du développement des premiers systèmes économiques et sociaux au sein de ce paysage varié. Une approche globale du paysage a été menée pour appréhender la richesse de la culture matérielle dans la région. À travers l'étude de l'agencement des sites et de leur relation avec le paysage, ce travail va au-delà des récits traditionnels régionaux en donnant des informations sur la relation qu'avaient les hommes avec leur environnement à travers les différentes échelles de temps de l'occupation néolithique.

Mots-clefs : Irlande, Mésolithique, Néolithique, paysage, littérature grise.

